

It has been exactly nine years since the assassination of Martin Luther King, yet still the question rankles: Who slew the dreamer? This startling new look at the evidence strongly suggests that James Earl Ray did not act alone. The answer to who aided and abetted him may lie very close to home **By Jeff Cohen and David S. Lifton**

A MAN HE CALLS RAOUL

One moment he was standing there, smiling, telling his friend to sing "Precious Lord" at the rally that night. Then a sound: a single, deafening roar. And, in the next instant, he was gone. Martin Luther King was dead, slain by an assassin's bullet.

Nine years have passed since that cool April evening at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, eight years since an escaped convict named James Earl Ray stood in a Tennessee courtroom and pleaded guilty to the crime. And still the question remains: Who slew the dreamer? Who killed Martin Luther King?

It all should have been settled by now. On the face of it, the evidence was overwhelming: A rifle of the same caliber of the gun that killed King found just yards from the scene of the crime, with Ray's fingerprints on it. An FBI investigation that included the largest (self-proclaimed) manhunt in history. And later an investigation of the investigation—a Justice Department probe of the FBI's handling of the case, concluding that there was no conspiracy, that James Earl Ray, acting on his own, did, in fact, shoot and kill Martin Luther King. And then there was Ray himself, guilty by his own plea.

And yet it nags: the loose ends, the unanswered questions, the FBI's

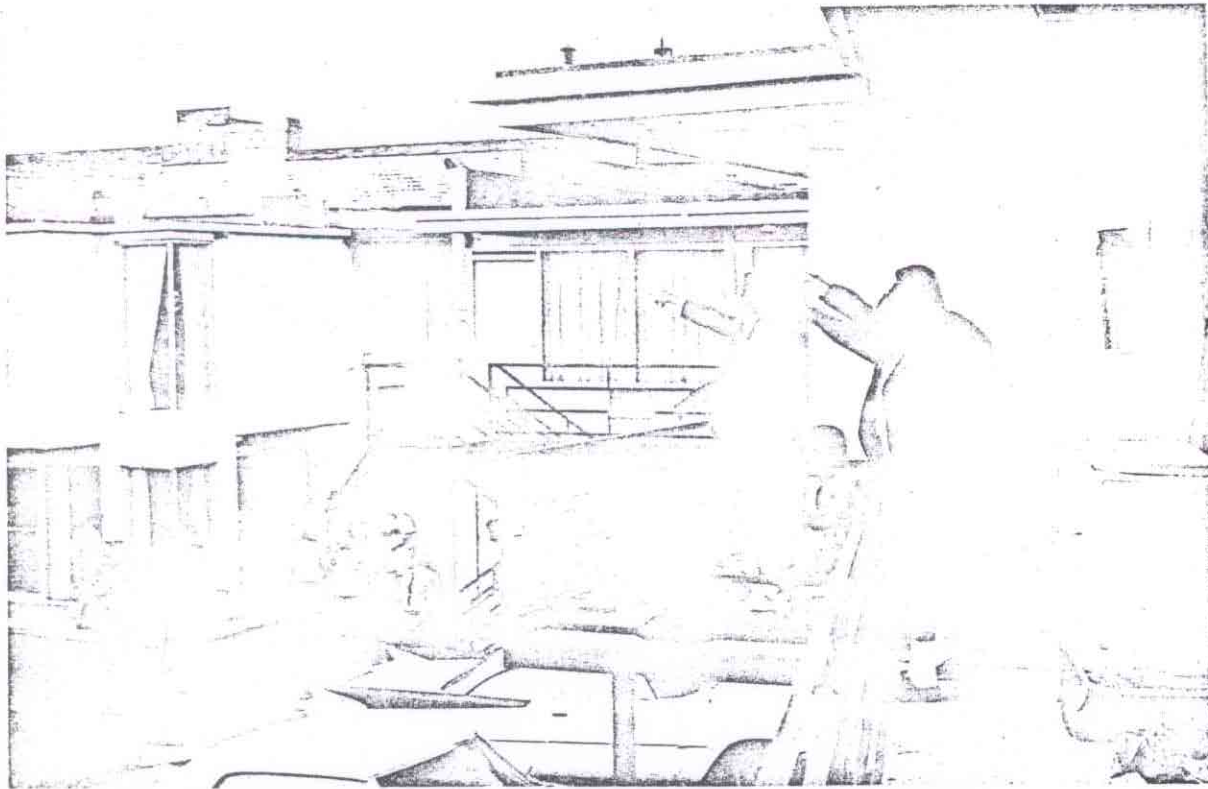
own hate campaign against King, Ray's courtroom outburst when the state declared that there was no conspiracy. His guilty plea, in exchange for a sentence of 99 years and in lieu of a trial, was a little too neat; it could hardly resolve the lingering doubts about how a small-time, chronically inept criminal such as James Earl Ray, with no ostensible motive, no violent past and no visible means of support, could raise the nearly \$10,000 he spent in three countries before the assassination, and then elude his pursuers for two months after the assassination, using several aliases and a false passport in his flight to Europe. Even Attorney General Griffin Bell, who recently announced the Justice Department's latest finding of no conspiracy, confessed that he had been "puzzled" by Ray's finances and travels.

Originally, the FBI had tried to prove that Ray himself financed his wayward travels through the proceeds of crime. The Justice Department report describes in detail how Bureau headquarters in Washington ordered every FBI office in the country to cull through every unsolved robbery and burglary that had occurred between Ray's April 1967 prison escape and his ultimate capture at London's Heathrow Airport, to see if any of them could be linked to

James Earl Ray. In Canada, where Ray lived for a month in the summer of 1967 and again immediately after the assassination, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police issued a similar directive. The end result of all this activity was that not one crime could be tied to Ray. In the end, Justice Department investigators were forced to conclude that Ray's finances—the money he used while allegedly planning, committing and escaping from the assassination—"still remain a mystery."

Ray's financial support, if the most glaring hole in the government's contention that Ray acted alone, is far from the only one. The government could not produce a single reliable eyewitness who could place Ray at the scene of the crime. The landlady who rented the alleged sniper's nest to "John Willard" was not able to identify Ray as her tenant. Witnesses who did see the apparent assailant described him as dark-complexioned, balding, with a long, pointed nose, and between the ages of 26 and 32. On the basis of their information, a police artist drew a sketch of the alleged assassin. It did not look like James Earl Ray, then 40, pale, full of hair and fresh from pre-assassination plastic surgery that had shortened his nose.

Nor could the FBI match the slug taken from King's body with the rifle



Memphis, April 4, 1968: King's aides (including Andrew Young, on left) point to the assassin's lair

found at the scene of the crime, which Ray had purchased at a Birmingham gun shop five days before. Nor could it explain how Ray, who had never been to Memphis before, was able to find his own way to a perfect sniper's lair.

There were other, vexing problems, such as how Ray acquired the four near-perfect aliases he used in his travels: Eric Starvo Galt, John Willard, Paul Bridgman and Ramon Sneyd. The names corresponded to real men who resided in the same Toronto suburb; three of the four bear a marked resemblance to Ray. Galt and Ray even have matching scars—on the forehead and right palm.

Taken alone, the aliases are a small thing perhaps, but in fact they are just part of the large body of evidence indicating that in his historic crime, James Earl Ray did not act alone. It is a notion that he himself has always insisted upon.

"Raoul"

Both before and since his guilty plea, Ray persistently has declared that he was an unwitting victim of a conspiracy—that he was aided, abetted, armed, fed, supplied, shuttled about and ultimately duped by others, others far larger than he. He says he does not know who they were, or what they were about, only the identity of one shadowy man. A man

he calls "Raoul."

Raoul. Was there such a person? Who did he work for? What was his motive? Who, really, was he?

With meticulous detail, James Earl Ray has described what Raoul did: how they met in a bar in Montreal in 1967, how they entered into a smuggling scheme together, how Raoul promised him money if he would move south, lie low and wait for instructions. How, one fateful day, seven months and thousands of dollars later, those instructions finally came, sending Ray to Memphis with a weapon Raoul had told him to buy; how, on April 4, 1968, James Earl Ray, sitting outside a ramshackle rooming house, heard a shot, and, a moment later, saw Raoul emerging, gun in hand.

Those who believe the state's case—that James Earl Ray, acting alone, shot and killed Martin Luther King—contend that Raoul exists only in Ray's imagination . . . that, as the Justice Department's latest investigation of the case puts it, "Ray's assertions that someone else pulled the trigger are so patently self-serving and so varied as to be wholly unbelievable. They become, in fact, a part of the evidence of his guilt by self-refutation."

And if Raoul actually exists, why won't Ray identify him? The question

has been asked since the story first surfaced, and Ray has just as steadfastly refused to answer it. Nothing sways him. Not a promised reduction in sentence offered him by both federal and state authorities in exchange for all he knows about the King assassination, not entreaties from private researchers, not the pleas of his own attorneys. According to Arthur Hanes Sr., his first lawyer, Ray becomes "tense" and "devious" when pressed for more information about Raoul. Hanes' son, Arthur Jr., who assisted in the defense, is more explicit: "When you ask Ray a hard question, like for a better description of Raoul, he hangs his head, runs his fingers through his hair, and says nothing. . . . Then he changes the subject."

Why should Ray protect the man who allegedly set him up? To the Justice Department and others, the answer is simple enough: Raoul is a lie, a non-person in a non-conspiracy. Even journalist William Bradford Huie, who was the exclusive recipient of Ray's 20,000-word narrative and whose articles in *Look* magazine first surfaced the Raoul story, has come to believe that Raoul was not one man, but a composite of several criminal accomplices with whom Ray had contact.

But there remains one other ex-

planation for Ray's determined silence, one as deep and abiding as the bond between brothers.

Jerry

James Earl Ray has a brother—two of them, in fact, both younger than he. The first, with whom he is not as close, is named John Larry, a twice-convicted felon now doing time in Leavenworth on a bank robbery charge. (John Larry's comment to the FBI after the King assassination: "What's all the excitement about? It's only a nigger—King should have been killed ten years ago.") The other, youngest Ray brother is Jerry, a Chicago-area country club handyman with a record of two teenage convictions for robbery. In 1968, Jerry Ray was a devoted lieutenant of Georgia lawyer J. B. Stoner, leader of the racist National States Rights party. James Earl and Jerry Ray are very close.

Just how close was a question that interested the Federal Bureau of Investigation from the moment the Bureau identified James Earl Ray as the suspected assassin of Martin Luther King; that day, April 19, 1968, federal agents called on Jerry at his room in the Sportsman Country Club, the first of many encounters between Jerry and the FBI.

It is not surprising that the Bureau was suspicious about Jerry Ray. The original fugitive warrant issued for "Eric Starvo Galt" (James Earl's primary alias) as the assassin of King also named one other suspect: "a man alleged to be his brother." The reference to the alleged brother was drawn from a remark James Earl had made in the Birmingham gun shop where, five days before the assassination, he purchased a .30.06 rifle—and where he explained that he was "going hunting with my brother."

In his first session with FBI agents, Jerry Ray told them that, no, he hadn't seen Jim since visiting him in prison in 1966. It was a lie. Today, now that the statute of limitations has run out, Jerry admits to two meetings with James Earl after the latter's 1967 prison escape: the first, while James was working at a Winnetka, Illinois, restaurant, shortly after the escape; and the second, some months later, when James, returning from Canada en route to Birmingham, transferred ownership of his car to Jerry.

The first person to specifically suggest that Jerry Ray might actually be involved in the King assassination was author William Bradford Huie. When Huie bought James Earl Ray's exclusive story, Ray's lengthy narrative provided a highly detailed account of his 13½-month odyssey, from '67 prison escape to '68 capture, complete with financial



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records, diagrams and maps. That narrative is possibly the most valuable resource in the entire King-Ray case, and during the initial investigative period, William Bradford Huie was the man most familiar with it.

On February 6, 1969, the night before Huie testified before a Memphis grand jury, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* interviewed Huie and reported: "Huie confirmed that . . . he would name at least one co-conspirator—the individual identified as 'Raoul' in previously published material." The next day, the following exchange took place before the grand jury:

HUIE: I have beliefs and there is one particular individual I am convinced had foreknowledge of the crime. . . .

PROSECUTOR: Would it be a fair statement to you to say that that was James Earl Ray's brother Jerry Ray?

HUIE: That is right. . . . The only man on earth who is close to Ray is his brother Jerry Ray. . . . so it is my opinion that Jerry Ray had foreknowledge of the crime and was in contact with his brother at every strategic moment before and after the crime.

The recently released Justice Department report on the King assassination lends substantial credence to Huie's allegations. While not naming Jerry as a co-conspirator, the report does make it clear that Jerry aided and abetted his brother after his escape from prison, lied to the FBI about the extent and nature of his contacts with James Earl, and would, had the statute of limitations not expired, be liable to prosecution.

"In the task force interview of Jerry Ray," reported the Justice Department, "he confirmed the fact that he had lied to the Bureau and had seen his brother James on several occasions. Jerry denied knowing anything about James' travels or his source of funds. However, the task force found the credibility of Jerry's denials to be suspect . . . we concluded that the FBI abandoned a significant opportunity to obtain answers from family members concerning some of the important questions about James Earl Ray which still remain."

In sum, the Justice Department is vaguely suspicious of Jerry Ray, doubts his credibility and is seemingly perplexed by his association with brother James both immediately before and after the assassination. With far more certainty, the department dismisses Raoul as a self-serving figment of James Earl's imagination.

Yet when the department's own data (including the FBI's) is matched

against James Earl Ray's narrative, a startling pattern emerges:

Before the assassination, Ray made numerous remarks to acquaintances and coworkers regarding various contacts with a "brother."

After the assassination, when describing these same contacts to Huie, Ray claimed that they were with Raoul.

This pattern of Jerry/Raoul juxtaposition is so consistent, so *persistent*, as to raise an inescapable question: Are Jerry Ray and Raoul one and the same?

Jerry/Raoul

June, 1967. For almost seven weeks, prison escapee James Earl Ray had been working as a kitchen helper at a suburban Chicago restaurant. He was taking home \$94 a week. Jerry Ray was employed at a nearby country club. Author Gerold Frank (who had access to FBI files) reports that during this period, Jerry visited James at least once at the restaurant's back door.

In mid-June, according to William Bradford Huie, James received "three or four pressing calls" at the restaurant that seemed to "excite" him. Inter-

When his Canadian lover cautioned Ray about his lavish spending, Ray smiled and said, "There's more where that came from"

viewed by the FBI, Ray's restaurant employers recalled that the calls had "a visibly disturbing effect" on him.

That week, James Earl Ray suddenly quit his job, and shortly thereafter headed for Canada—although not before (he was to tell Huie) conferring with Jerry.

July, 1967. James Earl arrived in Montreal, he later explained to Huie, on the lam and nearly broke. One day, not long after his arrival, sitting in his favorite hangout, the Neptune Tavern, he met the man who was to change his life—a man called Raoul. Subsequently, they met several times again at the Neptune. Finally, Raoul offered him a proposition:

- Ray was to meet Raoul in Windsor, Canada, on August 21, and to make several smuggling runs that day across the border to Detroit.

- Ray was then to resettle in Birmingham, Alabama, where he was to "lie low, take no risks . . . accumulate a little I.D." He was to wait there for Raoul, who would provide Ray with "living expenses" and a "suitable car."

- After some weeks or months of

joint projects, Raoul would provide Ray with \$12,000, a passport and help in going "anywhere in the world." Ray had only to abide by one condition: that he ask no questions. Raoul gave him a New Orleans phone number at which he could be reached.

Ray agreed to the proposition.

August 21, 1967. On this, his last day in Canada, Ray said, Raoul gave him a first cash installment.

There is only one problem with this story: the evidence of Ray's Canadian expenditures is completely out of sync with his version of events. Although supposedly almost broke, Ray's life style dramatically improved immediately upon his arrival in Canada. He rented an apartment in Montreal, bought some \$300 worth of clothing, vacationed in the Laurentian Mountains, and felt sufficiently flush to treat himself to manicures at the posh Queen Elizabeth Hotel.

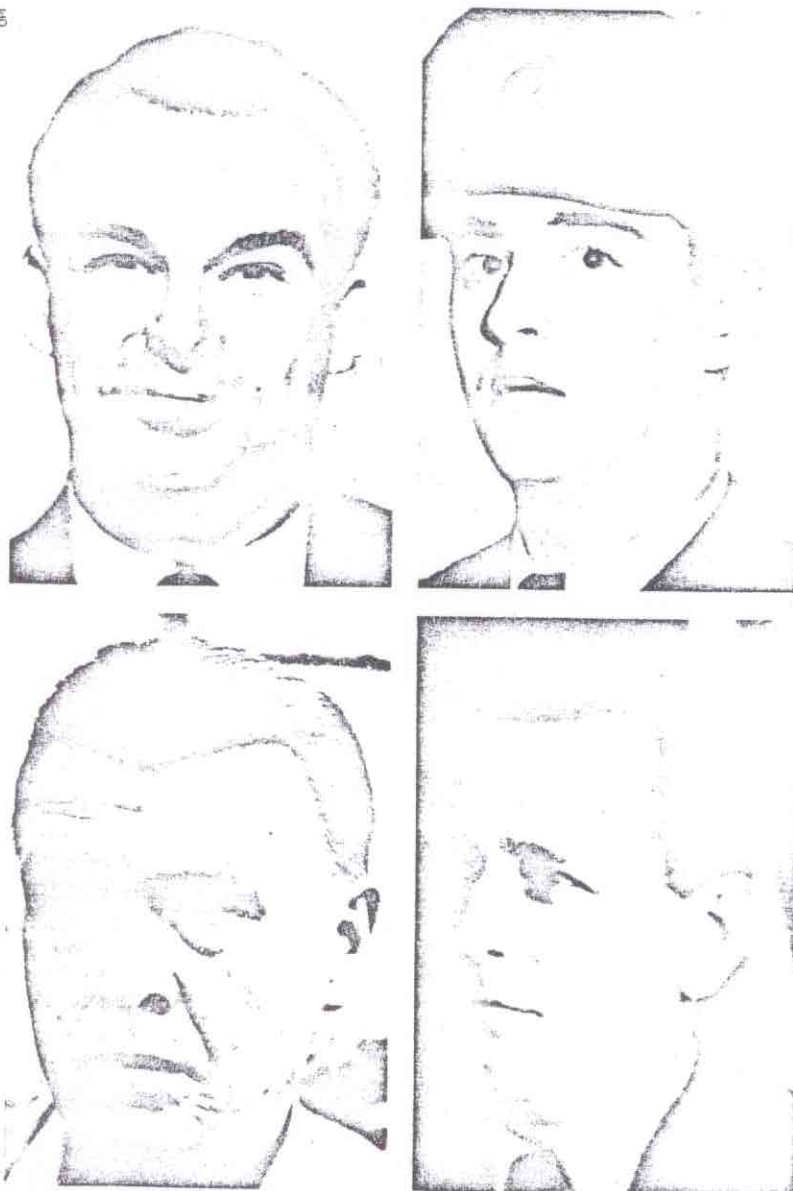
Ray told Huie that he had come to Canada with just \$300. But after only two days in Montreal, his expenses already totaled \$400. His known expenses during his stay in Canada totaled at least \$1,000. To account for the money, Ray told Huie a tale of having robbed a whorehouse, which later he changed to a food store. In either case, no such robbery was ever reported. It seems clear that Ray invented the hold-up in order to conceal where, when, how and from whom he had received his new funds. Whatever had happened to fatten his bankroll apparently had occurred *before* he came to Canada, in the days just before his departure from Chicago, when the evidence indicates a flurry of contact with brother Jerry.

There is one known witness to Ray's life during his stay in Canada, a woman employee of the Canadian government with whom he had a brief affair during his vacation in the Laurentians. In the chronology of Ray's narrative, the affair would have taken place just before Raoul laid out his proposition.

To Huie, the woman later recalled Ray's excitement about a new business venture—a successful one, apparently, for when she cautioned James Earl about spending his money so lavishly, he smiled and said, "There's more where that came from."

But, to her, Ray mentioned no partner named Raoul; instead, on August 7, the last day of his vacation, he told her he was rushing back to Montreal "to meet his brother" the next day. Ray also told her that his brother was from Chicago and that they worked together "in some sort of business."

The woman's recollections close-



Aliases: Fugitive Ray (bottom right) used the names of four Toronto residents. Three were very similar to him in age, height, weight and coloring

ly correlate with Ray's story to Huie—except that all of his (pre-assassination) references to his "brother" became (post-assassination) references to Raoul. Ray told Huie that he returned from vacation to meet Raoul in Montreal, not his brother. In Ray's narrative, the only ventures he envisioned were criminal activities with Raoul, not "business" activities with his brother.

In late August, 1967, Ray left Canada and returned briefly to Chicago. The Justice Department reports, "Illinois motor vehicle records showed that James Ray . . . transferred his 1962 Plymouth to Jerry. This was during a pe-

riod when James Ray was making his way from Canada to Birmingham, Alabama. It has continued to be a mystery as to why Ray went to Alabama, how he traveled there, and where he obtained the several thousand dollars he had when he arrived."

According to James Earl Ray, the money was no mystery at all. He says that five days after he arrived in Birmingham, Raoul came to the city and handed him \$2,000 on the street to buy—a few moments later—a car that Ray had spotted in a classified ad: the white Mustang which, seven months hence, would become the getaway car from Memphis

and the murder of Martin Luther King.

The evidence supports Ray's account that he was handed the cash just minutes before the purchase. Ray startled the car seller, William Paisley, by counting out an even \$2,000 right on the street outside a bank. Although Ray made it appear to Paisley that he had withdrawn the money from the bank just before Paisley arrived, Ray in fact had no account there.

(There is a strange twist to the car transaction. When Paisley was shown a picture of Ray after the assassination, he could not positively identify him as the man to whom he had sold the car. "Are you sure," he asked, "this isn't his brother?")

On October 6, 1967, Ray left Birmingham and headed for Mexico, where he claims to have met Raoul in Nueva Laredo. After a bit of smuggling (jewelry, grass), he vacationed the next month at Puerto Vallarta and Acapulco.

From Mexico, Ray moved to Los Angeles—"on Raoul's instructions"—lying low as ordered, passing his nights in bars and days in various self-improvement endeavors: bartending school, dancing lessons, hypnosis, plastic surgery. He also placed a personal ad for a woman sex partner in the *Los Angeles Free Press* ("SINGLE MALE, Cauc., 36 . . . digs French culture. Write Eric S.").

Ray had been in Los Angeles almost a month when, he says, Raoul summoned him in December to drive cross-country to New Orleans for a "brief conference." Ray did not make the trip alone. His traveling companion was an L.A. songwriter named Charles Stein. At one gas stop, Stein watched Ray talking excitedly into a pay phone; Stein's impression was that Ray was calling ahead to the man he was to meet in New Orleans.

Ray later told Huie "that he made three telephone calls on that trip, two of which were to Jerry Ray." Huie considers the contacts with Jerry at that time important ones. For, during his 36-hour stay in New Orleans, Ray told Huie, Raoul said that they had one more job to do "in about two or three months. Then he said we'd be finished." Three and a half months later, Martin Luther King would be dead.

Ray returned to Los Angeles, only to leave again on March 17, 1968, this time for good. He told Huie that he left on Raoul's orders. But shortly before departing, Ray turned down a job, explaining, "I have to leave to see my brother." According to the Justice Department, he told Richard Gonzales, a

fellow student at the bartending school they attended, that "upon completion of the course he was going to visit a brother in Birmingham for two weeks." To others, he said he was leaving the city to pick up money from his brother.

From L.A., Ray drove to New Orleans, then on to Birmingham where, he says, he picked up Raoul, and together they proceeded to Atlanta, Martin Luther King's hometown. They arrived there late Saturday night, March 23. With Raoul nearby, says Ray, he checked into a rooming house. (It was there, after the assassination, that the FBI discovered a map with one very clear fingerprint of Ray's and—according to the Bureau—the home, church and office of Martin Luther King circled in pencil.)

A week later, Ray returned to Birmingham. Once again (he told Huie after the assassination) he was with Raoul, rather than (as he had told Gonzales in L.A., before the assassination) with his brother. Whoever he was with, Ray's visit lasted only two days; it was long enough for him to purchase a gun.

"Raoul told me . . . to get a large bore deer rifle and gave me over \$700," Ray later told Huie. "After the purchase me and Raoul went back to the motel. He looked at the rifle and said it was the wrong kind." So Ray went back to the gun shop, exchanged the rifle for a 30.06, and had it fitted with a telescopic sight, following Raoul's instructions to the letter.

But were they Raoul's instructions?

During his first visit to the gun shop, Ray was observed by another customer, a gun enthusiast named John DeShazo. DeShazo could tell by the way Ray was examining the rifle that he obviously knew little about firearms. DeShazo thereupon struck up a conversation with Ray. In an affidavit for the FBI, DeShazo said: "[Ray] stated that he was going deer hunting in Wisconsin with a brother or brother-in-law." Later that afternoon, Ray phoned the gun shop and spoke to salesman Donald Wood. According to Wood's FBI affidavit, "[Ray] stated that he had had a conversation with his brother and had decided to exchange the rifle."

There is one other person who links a Ray "brother" to the gun transaction, and his testimony is the most compelling of all. Percy Foreman was James Earl Ray's second attorney. In a 1974 deposition, Foreman swore that Ray "told me Jerry was with him" when he bought the first rifle. Foreman has repeated his assertion that Jerry Ray was

involved in the gun purchase to several newsmen. When questioned about it recently by *New Times*, Foreman made the point again, emphatically: "Goddam it, yes! You think I'm a liar? He told me that. I wouldn't have sworn to it if he hadn't told me." Foreman then added: "I have no reason to doubt, and he had no reason to lie to me when he told me, that Jerry was with him."

April 3, 1968. Three days after the purchase of the sleek new rifle, one day before the assassination of Martin Luther King. Any contact that day between Ray and Raoul—whomever he might be—is obviously critical. Ray claims that he met with Raoul on April 3 in his room at the New Rebel Motel in Memphis. Maybe.

According to author George McMillan, the one person James did talk with for sure on April 3 was Jerry Ray. McMillan, who interviewed Jerry dozens of times during the preparation of a book on the King case, says that Jerry admits to talking with James by phone, from Chicago, the day before the assassination. In his book, McMillan quotes James Earl as telling his youngest brother,

"Jerry," Ray told his brother, "tomorrow it will be all over. Big Nigger has had it!"

er, "Jerry, tomorrow it will be all over. I might not see you and Jack [brother John Larry] for a while. But don't worry about me. . . . Big Nigger has had it!"

William Bradford Huie confirms this account, saying that Jerry told him the same thing late one night during a liquor-fueled meeting in Huntsville, Alabama.

James Earl Ray has said that it was Raoul, using the alias "John Willard," who rented the room in the house from which Martin Luther King was shot on April 4, 1968. As it happens, the landlady's description of "Willard," as well as the descriptions of other eyewitnesses—not to mention the composite drawings that were done of the alleged assassin—do not in fact resemble James Earl Ray, not as much as they do his younger, balding brother Jerry.

There is, finally, Ray's version of his last contact with Raoul: "I was sitting in the Mustang when I heard a shot. In a minute or so, Raoul came running down the stairs carrying my zipper bag and the rifle which was in the box and wrapped up in a bedspread I had brought from California. Just before he got in the

car, Raoul turned around and threw the rifle and my zipper bag down on the sidewalk. Then he jumped in the back seat, and covered himself with a sheet, and I took off. After I drove a few blocks, I stopped at a stoplight and Raoul jumped out. I then drove on south to Mississippi. I wasn't thinking about nothing but getting away. I knew that shot meant trouble."

One of the major mysteries of the case involves the white Mustang that Ray abandoned in Atlanta the day after he fled Memphis. When the car was found, cigarette and cigar ashes were littering the floor, and, according to Huie, the car was "reeking with cigar and cigarette smoke." Attorney Arthur Hanes, Ray's first lawyer, says that the car's ashtrays were filled with crushed Vice-roys, as was the Memphis room rented by "Willard." The problem is, James Earl Ray does not, and did not, smoke. The obvious conclusion is that someone was with him who did.

Huie told the grand jury: "Ray's explanation to me was that, 'Sure, Raoul was in the car—Raoul smokes.'" But then so does Jerry Ray. Jerry Ray is a chain-smoker.

Who, me?

It seems like a lifetime or two, but it is less than nine years since Jerry Ray was giving advice via the news media to his fugitive brother, James, the accused assassin of Martin Luther King, first urging him to surrender, then urging him not to, finally encouraging him to flee to a country with no extradition treaty with the U.S. (James, in fact, was on his way to just such a country—Rhodesia—when he was apprehended in London in June 1968.)

Jerry had his own theory of the killing in those days, a theory he readily shared with the press. Sure there was a conspiracy, he would say, a "giant conspiracy" in which his brother had been "used." "Look at all the money he came into all of a sudden—you don't get that kind of money from sticking up grocery stores." The conspirators, he would add, could rest easy—James Earl never has, and never would, rat on a partner. "That runs in the family," Jerry explained.

Three days after his brother's capture, Jerry told a Chicago television reporter, "I don't think he did it. I think he was used as a decoy in some way. I think he was contacted by someone when he escaped. By somebody who knew he was hot." Ironically, only one man ever could be proven to have had such a contact with James Earl Ray. That man was Jerry himself.



Bufs: Fiery Percy Foreman (left) was the second of numerous Ray attorneys; William Bradford Huie told the world Ray's 20,000-word story

To the notion that he might in any way have been involved with his brother in the murder of Dr. King, Jerry Ray's response is an indignant denial (and in the case of author George McMillan, a hefty lawsuit). He insists that he was in Chicago during the months both before and after the assassination, working the entire time at the Sportsman Club.

"The FBI questioned me for hours and hours," he says. "And they checked where I worked at. I worked there three years, never missed a day. And for four months, I worked seven nights a week. And they knew it was impossible for me to get anyplace, because I can't both work and leave the place." (Jerry Ray also says that the FBI has "cleared" him of any involvement in the assassination, a statement which the FBI categorically denies.)

Jerry further claims that several employees of the Sportsman Club can vouch for him during the assassination period, including the club's day and night managers, the chief administrator and the Glenbrook patrol service. When interviewed by *New Times*, however, none of these alibi witnesses could state with certainty that Jerry had been at the club on the nights in question. The club's chief administrator implied that the club's work records no longer exist.

Gordon Anderson, a patrolman for the Glenbrook patrol service who worked the graveyard shift with Jerry Ray, cannot substantiate Jerry's alibi, since he had left the patrol service two months before the assassination. Anderson does recall, however, that Jerry would "take off" occasionally. "I don't

know whether he called it a vacation or not," says Anderson, "but I know he mentioned several times that he went down to see his brother. He would go down to some of the southern states. I don't remember just which ones, and visit him . . . I believe he was sending him money." When pressed for the specific locations that Jerry may have visited, Anderson names St. Louis—and Atlanta and Birmingham as possibilities.

And what if it is all true? What if Jerry Ray *did* slip away from Chicago from time to time in 1967 and 1968 to

"We couldn't see any advantage in killing King," said Stoner. "If I had wanted him killed, I could have had it done years ago"

meet with his brother James in Atlanta, in Birmingham, yes, even in Memphis? What if he *did* guide James in the purchase of a rifle, *did* provide him with funds and instructions? What if, in fact, Jerry Ray is Raoul? What then?

For one thing, it does not automatically follow that Jerry Ray is a co-conspirator in the slaying of Martin Luther King, any more than the available evidence proves that James Earl Ray fired the fatal shot. Being Raoul is not necessarily a crime.

If, as James claims, he was duped into becoming a patsy in an assassination conspiracy, it is at least equally possible

that his brother Jerry was duped as well. Jerry, for instance, might logically have thought he was merely helping James, an escapee from prison, by providing him with cash and shuttling him around the country. In this case, it still would be difficult to explain how Jerry, a menial laborer all his life, could have come up with the thousands of dollars which James Earl Ray says Raoul gave him—unless, of course, Raoul/Jerry himself had a backer.

Thunderbolt

In person, Jerry Ray hardly seems like a liar, or an aider and abettor, as the Justice Department has characterized him, much less a co-conspirator in a momentous assassination plot. He comes off as a harmless, hateless man with gentle eyes and a clowning sense of humor. The years of constant press attention and contact with conspiracy buffs have mellowed and socialized him. His fellow employees at the Sportsman Country Club all remember him as a hard worker, a likable guy. Today, Jerry, 41, works at a predominantly Jewish country club in the Chicago area. "I don't care if someone is black or a Jew or whatever," he says. "If I'm around him long enough, I like him."

But there is another Jerry Ray. "The Jews have been run out of every country," he wrote to a Jewish radio personality in Atlanta in 1972, "and they will eventually be run out of the U.S. It might take another 50 or 75 years, but the Jews are like the Nigger beast, give them a rope and they will hang themselves . . . Robert Kennedy was worse than a Jew if that's possible . . . so I celebrated when he joined the rest of his kind in hell." A follow-up letter to the same broadcaster was so vicious and threatening that it was turned over to the FBI. *This* Jerry Ray is someone else entirely.

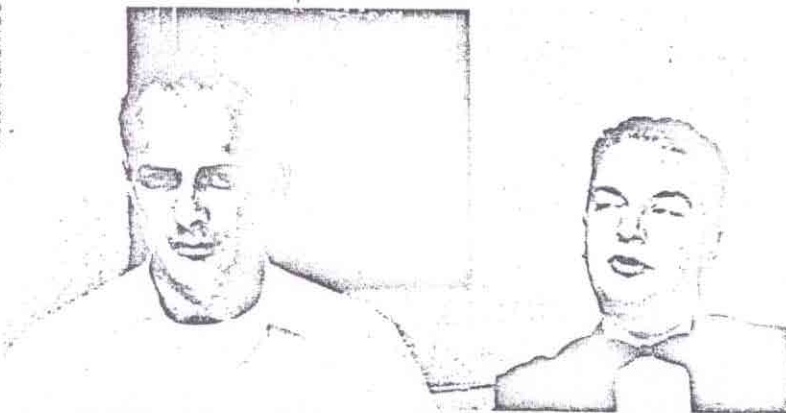
In this light, it becomes tempting to see Jerry's contacts with James in the weeks and months preceding the King assassination as nothing more, or less, than a plot by two brothers—a violent, racist rendering of the Hardy Boys. But at least one of the Hardy Boys—Jerry—had at one time a backer, a friend and supporter, who was no laughing matter. His name was Jesse B. Stoner.

To the Jerry Ray who viewed Jews as "devils" and blacks as "beasts," J.B. Stoner was a man for all reasons, a man worth following. At the time of the King assassination, Stoner was cochairman of the National States Rights party, an organization that he once boasted was "more extreme than the Klan."

Stoner began his career in racism in 1939, at the age of 18, when he became Klan Kleagle, or chief Klansman, for the entire state of Tennessee. Two years later, he founded the Stoner Anti-Jewish party. Its purpose, he explained, was "to make being a Jew a crime punishable by death. . . . We'll just take them out and kill them." As for blacks, Stoner said: "The nigger is not a human being. He is somewhere between the white man and the ape. He is our enemy."

After Stoner became a leader of the National States Rights party, he began publishing a newspaper, *The Thunderbolt*. Emblazoned with the Nazi swastika, the paper branded King "Martin Lucifer Coon." The party's headquarters were decorated with a caricature of King, hanging in effigy; underneath, a caption read, "N.S.R.P. Answer To The Civil Rights Movement: 'HANG 'EM HIGH!'"

THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL



Heroes: "When History is written," wrote Jerry Ray (left), "my brother James Earl Ray will be a Hero alongside of J. B. Stoner" (right)

When King began gaining prominence as he moved through the South, organizing the civil rights movement, Stoner and his supporters began trailing him. In one typical incident, in 1964, in St. Augustine, Florida, where King was then leading marches for racial equality, Stoner was credited with inciting a club-wielding white mob in an unprovoked attack on unarmed black demonstrators; as a result of the assault, 19 civil rights marchers were hospitalized. (In Alabama, authorities have long had Stoner under suspicion for the September 1963 bombing of the Birmingham church in which four young black girls were killed.)

Shortly after King's assassination, Stoner's *Thunderbolt* proclaimed: "The man who shot King was actually upholding the law of the land. . . . He should be given the Congressional Medal and a large annual pension for life, plus a

Presidential pardon." Stoner himself offered to defend James Earl Ray without charge, as well as to launch a fund-raising campaign on his behalf. Both offers were turned down by Ray's lawyer at the time, Arthur Hanes.

In September 1968, Jerry Ray, a faithful *Thunderbolt* reader, arranged for Stoner to visit his brother in prison. This angered Hanes, contributed to attorney-client friction, and led to his replacement by attorney Percy Foreman. When Foreman in turn was fired after Ray's guilty plea, Stoner promptly stepped into the spotlight, briefly becoming Ray's attorney-of-record. Stoner told the press that his connections with the Klan would help his client's case. "They show I'm a loyal white man," he said, "and the white people [of Memphis] are for white supremacy. King brought about his own death with his activities across the country. . . . He was a troublemaker."

Eventually, it dawned on James that such statements were not helping his case, and Stoner was dropped from the defense team.

But meanwhile, Stoner and Jerry Ray—who had met no later than the summer of 1968, and perhaps earlier—were growing ever closer to each other. Jerry not only moved to Savannah, Georgia, but actually moved in with Stoner, whose home included the offices of the NSRP and *Thunderbolt*. Jerry became Stoner's personal bodyguard and chauffeur.

The two men enjoyed a mutual admiration society. "I am sure when History is written," wrote Jerry, "my brother James Earl Ray will be a Hero along side of J.B. Stoner." In turn, Jerry was the guest of honor at an NSRP banquet, where he was introduced as "The Honorable Jerry Ray, brother of James Earl Ray." [Applause.]

In 1970, when Stoner ran against Jimmy Carter and others for governor of Georgia on a white supremacist platform, Jerry was promoted to campaign manager. During the campaign, a 17-year-old youth allegedly broke into Stoner's office and tried to cart away a box of NSRP membership records. Jerry Ray took aim with a .38 caliber pistol and shot him in the chest, seriously wounding him. Jerry was subsequently acquitted of a charge of aggravated assault.

It was two years later that J.B. Stoner gave a most intriguing interview to *Esquire* magazine:

STONER: We couldn't see any advantage in killing King. If I had wanted him killed, I could have had it done years ago. In fact, several years ago the FBI, through an undercover agent, offered me \$25,000 to kill King.

ESQUIRE: Why would anyone come to you with that kind of proposition?

STONER: Because I know people who do that kind of work.

ESQUIRE: If Ray was being used in an FBI plot, why doesn't he tell the truth about what he knows?

STONER: Because he doesn't want to hurt others who were duped.

Stoner concluded the interview by saying that he knew the identity of the man James Earl Ray called "Raoul." "Ray became involved in the conspiracy without ever knowing what its aim was," he said. "Ray was directed throughout by an intermediary." Stoner added that he knew who the "contact" was.

J.B. Stoner is still very much around. He was in the news only last month when an NSRP member and *Thunderbolt* subscriber, Fred Cowan, went on a shooting spree in New Rochelle, New York, killing six people—four nonwhite coworkers, a cop, and finally himself. Cowan's siege apparently was triggered by conflicts on the job, a Jewish boss and a growing number of black coworkers. Afterward, *Time* quoted Stoner as saying, "There's no point in our going out and shooting Jews and niggers, because we couldn't get rid of them that way. It has to be a national program."

Over the years, state and federal authorities have come to suspect that Stoner's violent rhetoric cannot be dismissed merely as fascist ravings. This should have been driven home years ago when a surreptitious tape recording was made of J.A. Milteer, a Stoner associate, as he discussed NSRP plans with a Miami police informer. The date was November 9, 1963.

Milteer told the informant that a

scheme was in the works to kill President Kennedy. The President, Milteer said, would be shot "from an office building with a high-powered rifle," and a patsy would be picked up "within hours . . . just to throw the public off." The Miami police were sufficiently impressed with Milteer's seriousness that the Secret Service was alerted, and an imminent presidential motorcade into that city was canceled. Two weeks later, after Kennedy had been slain in Dallas, Milteer told the same informant that "everything ran true to form," and that the right wing was in the clear because Lee Harvey Oswald "doesn't know anything."

During the original taped conversation, Milteer also revealed a plot against Martin Luther King, one involving an NSRP hitman named "Brown":

MILTEER: He hasn't said so, but he tried to get Martin Luther King.

INFORMANT: He did?

MILTEER: Oh yes, he followed him for miles and miles, and couldn't get close enough to him. . . .

INFORMANT: Well, he will damn sure do it, I will tell you that . . . that is why we have to be so careful, you know that Brown is operating strong.

MILTEER: He ain't going for play, you know. . . . He is going for broke.

Zorro

Did "going for broke" on the part of Stoner's NSRP ultimately result in the assassination of Martin Luther King? That is one of the many unsettled—and unsettling—questions that continue to surround his slaying nine years ago this month.

Another question, a crucial one: When did Jerry Ray's alliance with J.B. Stoner and the NSRP begin—after the King assassination, or before? Both Jerry and Stoner are evasive on the subject, but at the very latest, the two got together in the summer of 1968.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the entire King-Ray investigation is the uncertain role played throughout by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There is considerable evidence to indicate that the Bureau's probe was, at best, half-baked and half-hearted, particularly in relation to any possible conspiracy.

Item: For some time prior to the assassination, FBI agents had maintained continual electronic and photographic surveillance of Dr. King. Where were they on April 4, 1968?

Item: James Earl Ray's own detailed chronicle of his 13½ months on the run in 1967-68—possibly the single most valuable resource in the case—was nev-

er fully utilized in the FBI's official investigation. By the time William Bradford Huie published Ray's full narrative in 1970, the Bureau had "closed" its file.

Item: Not one of Jerry Ray's alibi witnesses at the Sportsman Country Club was ever interviewed by the FBI. Considering that its own original warrant for "Galt"/Ray referred to a conspiracy involving a "brother," it seems an astonishing lapse that the Bureau nonetheless never thoroughly checked out Jerry Ray's story.

Item: *New Times'* own investigation of the case makes it clear that several other obvious leads—such as Jerry Ray's whereabouts the day his brother purchased the rifle in Birmingham—were never adequately pursued by the Bureau.

Item: In his first meeting with FBI agents, Jerry Ray said that he had not seen James Earl since a 1966 prison visit. Although this was disproved by the Bureau within a few days, no action was ever taken against him for furnishing

In any serious probe of the King homicide, members of the FBI's Atlanta Intelligence Unit would have been suspects, not investigators

false information to the FBI—a federal offense.

Despite Jerry Ray's attempted cover-up of his pre-assassination contacts with brother James, the Bureau soon dropped him as a "prime suspect." At least one agent, however, Memphis bureau chief Robert Jensen, remained unconvinced of his innocence. According to Memphis reporter Wayne Chastain, Jensen bumped into Jerry Ray in 1969 at Nashville State Prison, where Jerry was visiting his older brother. "If I had anything to do with it," Jensen angrily told Jerry, "you'd be in there with him."

The Bureau's puzzling reluctance to probe deeper into Jerry's 1967-68 contacts with James was an omission that the recent Justice Department report on the case sharply criticized. (At the same time, the report itself includes not a single word about J.B. Stoner or the NSRP.) Considering J. Edgar Hoover's well-known loathing for Martin Luther King, and the FBI's well-documented campaign to undermine and harass the black leader (up to and including death

threats), one can only wonder if the Bureau's lackluster investigation of Jerry Ray—indeed, of the entire range of conspiracy possibilities—was a matter of ineptitude, or of intent.

One man who might have the answer is Arthur Murtagh, who recently retired in good standing from the FBI after 21 years. Murtagh was a member of the Bureau's Atlanta Intelligence Unit, supposedly a major element in the FBI's investigation into King's murder.

In any serious probe of the King homicide, members of the unit might well have been suspects, not investigators, for within the FBI, says Murtagh, the Atlanta group was widely known as the "get-King squad." Its leader considered King "a menace to our society."

Upon hearing that Dr. King had been wounded, Murtagh says, the agent in charge of the unit cried out, "I hope the son of a bitch dies." Later, when word came through that King was dead, Murtagh recalls the same agent literally jumping up and down in "exaltation." "They got Zorro [a code name for King]. . . . They got Zorro," he kept repeating. "They finally got that son of a bitch."

According to Murtagh, the subsequent investigation was glaringly deficient. "We conducted a straight criminal investigation," he says. "We never even looked for a conspiracy." Leads that might have uncovered one were disregarded—"washed out," in Murtagh's words.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that today, in the minds of millions of Americans, the murder of Martin Luther King remains unsolved and the official findings unsatisfactory. The House of Representatives has finally caught up with public opinion and has appointed a special Committee on Assassinations to reexamine the whole garbled case from beginning to end. If the committee can survive its own internal bloodletting, one of the first witnesses it is expected to call is Jerry Ray.

As for Jerry's imprisoned brother, the man who says he was framed, he has hired yet another attorney and seems more willing than ever before to discuss the "conspiracy" with authorities. To date, however, he has not altered his story. Robert Livingston, who served as his lawyer for six years and has spent countless hours talking with him, says that James Earl Ray's litany is unchanging.

"I've practically gotten down on my knees and begged him for information about what really happened," reports Livingston, "but all he ever says is 'Raoul, Raoul, Raoul.'"